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SUBJECT: CPC UPDATE: COLLECTING GARBAGE & ELECTRIC BILLS, GIVING SWINE-FLU REFERRALS, AND STEALING PUBLIC LAND AND JOBS

REF: A. MANAGUA 454

[1](#)B. MANAGUA 443

Classified By: Ambassador Robert J. Callahan for reasons 1.4 (b & d)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: The Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) political party and its Citizen Power Councils (CPCs) continue to embed themselves into the fabric of Nicaraguan life. In addition to being behind recent public attacks against NGOs and serving as the primary distribution points for the Government of Nicaragua's (GON) Zero Hunger and other populist programs, CPCs now offer new public services: directing garbage collection priorities; collecting electric bills for a power company; providing medical information and referrals for swine flu victims; controlling water in rural areas; and setting up illegal structures on public property. Perhaps most troubling of all, CPCs are being called on by FSLN mayors to fill the jobs of public employees who are dismissed for not affiliating with the FSLN party. END SUMMARY

POLITICAL GARBAGE COLLECTION

[1](#)2. (SBU) By the end of the Nicaraguan summer (December to April), tons of garbage usually collect in Managua's extensive open storm drains and sewer system. Every February, the Managua municipal government spends millions of cordobas (Nicaraguan official currency C\$20/\$1 USD) to remove debris that could clog storm drains and cause flooding when the heavy rains return in May/June. Managua's new FSLN mayor, ex-boxer Alexis Arguello, announced on January 15 (his first day on the job) that the CPCs and the Managua municipal government were to work together in providing public services. On February 10, 2009, local media reported that CPCs would set the Managua municipal garbage collection priorities. On a simple piece of paper stuck to a municipal information blackboard, the Managua Fourth District work crew announced that the FSLN would determine priorities for garbage pickup. Local media reported that a chronological municipal report of scheduled cleanup sites confirmed that CPC neighborhoods received priority garbage collection service over non-CPC neighborhoods, even where there was an FSLN-majority.

COLLECTING ELECTRIC BILLS AS A PUBLIC SERVICE?

[1](#)3. (SBU) In March 2009, local media ran a series of headline stories about CPCs in Managua neighborhoods acting as collection agents for Union Fenosa, a Spanish company that distributes electricity in Nicaragua. The GON currently has a 16 percent stake in Union Fenosa's Nicaraguan subsidiary and most Nicaraguans do not pay for their electricity - in one Managua neighborhood alone, it is estimated that 92 percent of 1,800 clients have not paid their bills in months. The National Assembly had refused to pass legislation that would pay millions of dollars owed to the company unless it could improve customer collections. Calling them "Commissars of Light," CPC members were organized and paid to strong-arm their neighbors into paying their electrical bill in an effort to improve the image of Fenosa. Union Fenosa spokesperson, Jorge Katin, admitted that hiring collection agents was a normal practice, but would not confirm that the company only hired CPC members since November 2008. Marcos Carmona, a Nicaraguan human rights activist, confirmed the state-party confusion that the Fenosa practice of hiring CPCs to collect unpaid bills has created.

SWINE FLU AWARENESS & REFERRALS

[1](#)4. (SBU) In April 2009, the Ministry of Health (MINSa) published an emergency handbook on swine flu that states that CPCs have a primary role

CONTROLLING WATER ACCESS

[1](#)5. (SBU) In May 2009, local media reported that CPCs were controlling water access to the rural communities of Palo de Pan and El Roble near Diriamba in the Carazo department, south of Managua. The two communities have over 1,000 residents and have not had adequate water supply for years from Enacal, the National Nicaraguan water service. Community leaders complained that for the past two years water was available once a week and usually during the night. Now Enacal has given CPC leaders authority to open and close water lines. According to local contacts, these CPC leaders were deliberately redirecting scarce water resources to other CPC households instead of sharing it equally among residents. When community members attended CPC meetings to complain, they were told that Enacal was at fault for the distribution

problems. Local media also reported a similar case in San Juan del Oriente, in which CPCs moved a water pump to another neighborhood that was "FSLN-friendly."

OCCUPYING PUBLIC PROPERTY ILLEGALLY

16. (SBU) On May 20, 2009 local media reported that CPCs were illegally occupying public land in Chinandega. According to the article, CPCs helped construct a vegetable stand and install a cement latrine on land that belonged to Chinandega's historic railroad station and now is under FSLN mayor Enrique Hidalgo's jurisdiction. The site also illegally borrows water and electricity from a nearby public school. The beneficiary of the new vegetable stand told reporters that the CPCs had permission directly from First Lady Rosario Murillo (who directly oversees the CPCs) to build on the site on the public land and borrow water and electricity from the school. However, the FSLN mayor said that the CPCs were illegally occupying the site and that the municipality actually had plans to develop the land into a civic center for the community.

STEALING JOBS FROM NON-FSLN PUBLIC WORKERS

17. (SBU) On May 20, 2009 a local newspaper revealed that the FSLN Mayor of Ciudad Dario, Angel Cardoza, ordered 44 CPC members to take over the positions of public workers he had fired for joining a non-FSLN aligned workers union. The 44 public workers illegally fired for their political affiliation had more than 20 years of experience in the municipal government and many were single mothers. Starting in January 2009, the workers began losing their jobs to CPC members, who have no previous experience working in municipal government. The 44 workers have filed appeals with the Ministry of Labor (MITRAB) for the violations of Nicaraguan labor laws and collective agreements, but have little hope that the FSLN-control MITRAB or the justice system will support their cause.

COMMENT

8 (C) CPCs continue to embed themselves into Nicaragua's public service delivery systems - exercising control over garbage collection, water and
CALLAHAN